

Rick Gonzalez, AIA  
Vice Chairman

Reid J. Nelson  
Executive Director, Acting



April 9, 2021

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
Secretary of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Madam Secretary:

Acting as chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) during that position's current vacancy, I am writing to you regarding the Department of the Interior's (DOI) upcoming report to the National Climate Task Force on a strategy for creating a Civilian Climate Corps. Established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the ACHP's mission is to promote the preservation, enhancement, and sustainable use of our nation's diverse historic resources, and to advise the President and the Congress on national historic preservation policy. The ACHP appreciates your leadership on this issue and writes to encourage DOI to address not only natural resources in its strategy for a Civilian Climate Corps, but also to consider how such an initiative could assist in managing climate impacts on cultural resources.

In 2014, the Union of Concerned Scientists released a report, *National Landmarks at Risk: How Rising Seas, Floods, and Wildfires Are Threatening the United States' Most Cherished Historic Sites*. Through a series of case studies illustrating climate change impacts to significant cultural resources (many of them federally owned and managed), the report concludes that:

*Many of the United States' iconic landmarks and heritage sites are at risk as never before. Sea level rise, coastal erosion, increased flooding, heavy rains, and more frequent large wildfires are damaging archaeological resources, historic buildings, and cultural landscapes across the nation. From sea to shining sea, a remarkable number of the places where American history was made are already under threat. The geographic and cultural quilt that tells the American story is fraying at the edges – and even beginning to be pulled apart – by the impacts of climate change.*

Not only nationally significant landmarks are in jeopardy, however. Historic buildings and neighborhoods, archaeological sites, and culturally important landscapes and places throughout the country are at risk from climate change impacts. Their loss can irrevocably change a community's sense of place and erode people's sense of personal identity and stability. A Civilian Climate Corps could play an important role in helping to reduce and mitigate such impacts.

Activities by a Civilian Climate Corps to restore public lands and waters would help to protect associated cultural resources by making surrounding landscapes, forests, wetlands, and coasts as resilient as possible to climate catastrophes. But a Civilian Climate Corps also could work directly with cultural resources to

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assist in their protection and in bolstering community resilience. For example, Corps members could potentially help communities in undertaking vulnerability assessments of their historic buildings. They could also help to monitor climate impacts on resources, particularly archaeological sites, and assist in excavation of such sites in advance of unavoidable loss due to climate change. In such ways, a Civilian Climate Corps could provide a needed influx in human resource capacity to federal agencies, states, Indian tribes, and local communities that are striving to address climate impacts on historic places.

Fully incorporating protection of cultural resources into the work of a Civilian Climate Corps would be in keeping with the federal government's role and responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act. In accordance with that Act, the federal government is to be a national preservation leader, manage and care for cultural resources under its control, and foster both non-federal governmental and private preservation activities. Climate change adds new challenges to fulfilling these responsibilities and calls for creative approaches. I hope that DOI will integrate protection of cultural resources into development of a Civilian Climate Corps strategy.

The ACHP stands ready to assist DOI in any way we can. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this further, please feel free to contact me, or your staff is welcome to follow up with acting ACHP Executive Director Reid Nelson at [rmelson@achp.gov](mailto:rmelson@achp.gov). Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rick Gonzalez", with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Rick Gonzalez, AIA  
Vice Chairman